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Objectives of study of the Head Start Program for underprivileged children in the rural Alabama counties of Coosa and Elmore were to supply information about: (1) the background, family life, and social experiences of the participating children; (2) the mother-child relationship; and (3) the mother's knowledge and evaluation of the program. Questionnaires and interviews supplied the data from a randomly selected representative group of 74 mothers out of almost 300 involved. The conclusion reached as a result of the study was that due to the mothers' limited time per child, lack of education and knowledge of the needs of their children, the children were at a distinct disadvantage when entering school without the pre-school Head Start experiences. Recommendations were that Head Start be extended into a 12-month program, that more parents be involved, and that an extensive survey be made of disadvantaged children. Various figures and tables are included. (CM)

THE COOSA-ELMORE COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE OEO-21

parent-child involvement in head start

A report by Dianna Bess McKay

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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT INTERNSHIP PROJECT
SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD / OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARENTS AND CHILDREN INVOLVED IN THE 1967 COOSA-ELMORE SUMMER HEAD START PROGRAM

By Dianna Bess McKay

For

The Coosa-Elmore Community Action Committee

December, 1967

ED025358

Project Committee

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT INTERNSHIP PROJECT/Sponsored by Office of Economic Opportunity/ Administered by Southern Regional Education Board, 130 Sixth Street, N. W., Atlanta, Georgia 30313.

FOREWORD

This report represents the work of a college student serving as an intern in resource development for 12 weeks. The intern with the assistance of agency officials, local citizens and a university professor has carried out a project needed by the local organization to which he was assigned.

The practical utility of the project for the local situation and the use of the project as an educational opportunity for the student are equally stressed. To increase the educational value of the internship, students are counseled individually by the university or college professors on their committees and also attend seminars on development emphasizing the interrelationships of various programs, approaches and facets of development.

This report includes the student's findings, observations, suggestions and opinions as well as recording information he has obtained. Therefore the report does not necessarily reflect the attitudes, plans or policies of the local organization, participating university or college, sponsoring agency or the Southern Regional Education Board. It is a student's contribution to the continuing processes of social and economic growth in our region.

Internships in resource development are offered to college juniors, seniors and graduate students as service-learning opportunities in social and economic change. Beginning with four students in 1964 under cooperative arrangements between the Clinch-Powell River Valley Association, Tennessee Valley Authority and the University of Tennessee, the program has grown to include a total of 182 internships through the summer of 1967. Interns are sponsored by five agencies involved in development efforts and interested in the motivation and education of young persons as potential career workers and community leaders in development programs. These agencies are: Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Tennessee Valley Authority and U. S. Department of Labor.

Internships are administered by the Resource Development Project of the Southern Regional Education Board. SREB is a public agency of fifteen Southern states created by interstate compact to assist in the development of higher education and the fostering of social and economic growth in the southern region. Further information on the internship programs may be obtained from:

Resource Development Project
Southern Regional Education Board
130 Sixth Street, N. W.
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Finally, special appreciation is extended to Dr. John E. Dunkelberger, professor at Auburn University, for his capable direction and untiring efforts in assisting me in writing my final report.

INTRODUCTION

The Coosa-Elmore Community Action Agency was officially created in the spring of 1967. As one of the first tasks of the agency in fulfilling its responsibility to the people of the two-county area, a Head Start Program was initiated for the areas underprivileged children. Classes were held in five centers throughout the two counties for eight weeks during the summer months.

My job as a summer intern was to design and carry out a small research project which would provide background information about the types of families and family situations represented by the children involved in the program. Information was needed by agency leaders and workers to better enable them to plan a program which would fill the gaps in the pre-school experiences of the children. The general purpose of the Head Start Program is to supply the wider range of pre-school experiences common to children from better homes. In order to adequately fulfill this purpose it was believed a better picture of the underprivileged child's experiences was needed.

Specific objectives of the study were 1) to supply information concerning the home background and family life experiences of Head Start children, 2) to study the relationship existing between the mother and the Head Start child in these families, 3) to determine the types of social experiences outside the family that the child had before entering the Head Start program and 4) to obtain the mother's evaluation of the program as determined from her knowledge and opinions of her child's Head Start experience.

Description of Two-County Area

The first requirement in designing my research study was to obtain a clearer picture of the two-county area in which the Head Start program was conducted. Although I had lived in the area all my life, I felt that I knew very little about the area except in a superficial manner. Therefore, my first activity was to review some of the U. S. census data available for the two counties involved.

Both Coosa and Elmore Counties are in the central section of Alabama. Coosa County lies northeast of Elmore County and both counties are directly north of Montgomery County in which the state capital is located. Both are located in the foothills of the Appalachians. Most of the terrain can be described as rocky, rolling hills, and both counties are primarily rural.

Coosa County Employment opportunities in Coosa County are very limited with the major sources of work being a small textile plant and scattered sawmill and pulpwood operations. Many residents go to adjoining counties for employment, particularly to the large textile mills in Tallapoosa and the quarries in Talladega Counties.

There are no urban areas in Coosa County according to the 1960 census, but there are two small towns, Goodwater and Rockford. Although the people all live in small rural communities and open country, only 15 percent actually live on farms.

The total population of Coosa County was 10,726 with 36 percent of the residents being non-white. The population was rather young in that 40 percent were under 18 years of age. There has been a continuous migration of young adults between 18 and 35 years of age from the county and this has reduced the size of the available labor force. The median level of education for persons 25 years of age and over was 8.3 years.

Elmore County Tallassee with a population of 4,934 and Wetumpka with a population of 3,672 are the two urban areas in Elmore County. Tallassee is on the eastern border of the county, along the Tallapoosa River. Two textile mills are located there because of the available water supply. Wetumpka is nearer the center of the county and located on the Coosa River. It is the county seat and has one small textile mill.

The small town of Millbrook, located in the southwestern corner of the county, is presently the fastest growing area. Its close proximity to the metropolitan area of Montgomery, with its wide range of employment opportunities and the recent suburbanization in its direction caused by the new Interstate highway probably accounts for this growth.

Elmore County also has two small sewing plants, several sawmills and some pulpwood activities scattered throughout the rural areas. The production of electric power at five plants located on the Tallapoosa and Coosa Rivers gives added employment and a real boost to the county's economic picture.

The total population for Elmore County according to the 1960 census was 30,524 with 34 percent consisting of non-whites. Nineteen percent of the population lived on farms with an additional 59 percent in the open country. The age distribution consisted of a high proportion of young people 18 years of age or younger. A high rate of out-migration had been recorded for the preceding decade just as in Coosa County. Since the younger and better educated adults are leaving the county, the median years of schooling completed by persons 25 years of age and older was only 8.7 years.

Design of Study

The Coosa-Elmore Head Start Program was conducted for the first time at five centers in the two counties during the summer of 1967. Two of the centers were located in Coosa County at Weogufka and Goodwater; and three were located in Elmore County at Millbrook, Wetumpka, and Tallassee.

Almost three-hundred mothers had enrolled their children in Head Start prior to the opening day of the school. From this enrollment 74 families or 25 percent were selected at random for participation in the study. Five additional mothers were selected as alternates in case I was not able to obtain interviews with any of the original 74 mothers.

The mothers chosen were selected from the enrollees at the Millbrook, Wetumpka, and Weogufka centers only. My justification for this was to select families from the most widely differing residential situation in terms of their rural-urban background. It appeared that these three centers most nearly represented a cross section of the population in the two counties involved in the program.

Families in the Millbrook area were all rural despite the area's growing suburban character because few of these newer residents were in the low-income category. The Wetumpka center had children who lived within the city limits as well as some from the outlying areas. Finally, the Weogufka families were predominantly white, whereas the other centers served largely Negro children.

Development of questionnaire Two questionnaires were constructed for the study. The first was designed to look at the family backgrounds of the children. Factors such as household composition, level of living, food consumption, medical history, interests and hobbies of mother and child, and the nature of the mother and child relationship were considered.

The second questionnaire was designed primarily to determine how much the mothers knew about the program their children had participated in and to learn the nature of their evaluation of the program. In this last regard I hoped to find out in what ways the mothers felt the program was or was not beneficial to their children.

Sample composition Initial contact with the 74 mothers selected for the study occurred during the first two weeks of the child's experience before the impact of the program could have much effect on either the child or mother. Among the mothers interviewed, 59 were Negroes and 15 were whites. This distribution was consistent with the proportion of Negroes and whites in the total program. Also, 54 of the mothers had no direct contact with the Head Start Program while 20 mothers were hired as aides. Aides were mothers who assisted the teachers in working with the children at the centers.

A follow-up interview using the second questionnaire was conducted with a random subsample of 32 mothers from the original sample. This interview was made during the child's final week in school and after the mother had had time to form her opinions of the program. In the follow-up survey, 25 of the mothers interviewed were Negroes and seven were whites. Moreover, eight had been aides while 24 had had no direct contact with the program.

SELECTED FAMILY SITUATION

My first reaction upon contacting and interviewing the mothers of Head Start children concerned the wide range of different family situations encountered. It seemed to me that a mere cataloging of collective facts on the sample of families would not do the data justice. For this reason, I have included descriptions of three family situations which I feel to be somewhat typical of the families served by the program. I hope the pictures presented will provide basis for a better understanding of the quantitative data which makes up the remainder of the report.

Family A

There were thirteen people in this household. Household members included the mother and her six children, two children of the sixteen-year-old daughter and one of the mother's sisters and her three small children. The mother, who had a sixth grade education, had been separated from her husband for several years, and no man was reported living in the home at the time of the interview.

The family lived in a small, run-down three room house. Sleeping facilities included three double beds and a couch which made into a bed at night. Three or four children slept in each bed. The family had none of the common household conveniences taken so much for granted by the middle class people today such as a refrigerator, washing machine, or piped water.

The mother was not employed herself but cared for all the children while the oldest daughter and the sister worked. Mother A received a $92 Social Security check each month which gave her a yearly income of $1,104 for herself and her six children. She spent between fifteen and twenty dollars a week for groceries which included approximately $2 a week for non-food items. Per capita food expenditures were less than $3 per week.

A typical day's menu as reported by this mother included:

Breakfast - grits, biscuits, syrup, water, and occasionally milk for the small children.

Lunch - Left-over biscuits and syrup or a peanut butter sandwich and cool-aid.

Dinner - Peas, collard greens, cornbread, and sometimes a piece of meat such as pig's ears or feet.

On my first visit with this mother, I found her on the front porch watching the children play. While I talked with her, six or seven small children sat around the porch and listened. All the children looked undernourished and sickly.

When I made my second visit, I found the mother was working as an aide at the Head Start center. She reported that she had become very interested in the program when she enrolled her child on opening day, and she had returned several days the first month to do volunteer work with the program. The second month she was employed as a teacher's aide. A neighbor cared for the children in the mornings while she worked at the center.

This mother and family seemed to have benefited a great deal from its association with Head Start. The mother felt that her child had been helped by the program and that it had been especially helpful in preparing her to adjust to school. A change in the mother was quite evident as she seemed to have more pride in herself and a greater interest in the welfare of her children as a result of having worked with the program.

Family B

This family was composed of the father, mother, and three pre-school boys. The father, who was 26 years old and had a sixth grade education, was a pulpwooder with an annual income of almost $3,000. His wife had an eighth grade education and was not employed outside the home.

The family was in debt and paid monthly mortgage payments on their small, four-room house. It was fairly new, but was already in need of repair because it had not been cared for properly. This family owned a car, a television, a refrigerator, and a stove, but they did not have inside water or bathroom, a washing machine, or other household conveniences. They received no newspapers or magazines and had no telephone. They were completely isolated from formal organization in the community since they did not belong to any church or community organization.

This mother was very concerned about giving her family well-balanced meals. Both times I visited in the home, she was canning or making jelly. In addition to the home-grown fruits and vegetables, the family spent about $20 per week for groceries. However, milk was not included in the diet because the boys didn't like it and the mother couldn't see any need to force them to drink it if they didn't want it.

The little boys had no toys except an old tire, boxes, and a ball, but they had a big yard and they seemed content just to play with each other. The mother reported she took the boys on walks almost every day, and often they went swimming in a nearby creek.

Considerable concern was shown by this mother about having her children get an education. A lack of education had hindered her and her husband in their attempts to get ahead, and she wanted a better chance for her boys. She was very pleased with the progress her child had made at the Head Start school.

This mother appeared to try hard to do what was best for her family, but she felt handicapped by not having an adequate education. She seemed eager to learn, but didn't know what she could do or where she should turn for help.

Family C

Seven people comprised this family, including an elderly aunt, father, mother, and four children. They lived in the country in a spacious eight-room frame house surrounded by a large, well-cared-for yard.

Both parents graduated from high school, and the father was employed part-time as a church janitor and also as a school bus driver. Their income was only $3,000 a year, but they appeared to manage this money quite well, as they owned or received most common level of living items.

The mother was very active in the affairs of the rural community. She sang in the church choir, was a Sunday school teacher, and was president of her home demonstration club. She also spent several hours a day in various activities with the children such as teaching them to do useful things around the home.

She was glad that her son had the opportunity to participate in the Head Start School. She said that he had always been very shy and unsure of himself, but that now he was able to talk more openly and seemed more at ease with other children.

The above cases illustrate the wide range of families included in the Head Start Program. Additional information of a quantitative nature will be presented in the remainder of this report which will further indicate the nature of the poverty situation in Coosa and Elmore Counties from which the Head Start participants come. This information should help point up more clearly the needs of these youth

Information obtained through my two interviews with the Head Start mothers provided a considerable amount of descriptive information. The following presentation reports the findings for all mothers interviewed with special attention to Negro-white differences and variations in program awareness and evaluation between aide and non-aide mothers wherever applicable.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

During a child's pre-school years his attitudes, values, and behavior are influenced more by his family than by all other factors combined. For this reason, we obtained information concerning the child's family background in order to better understand the conditions determining his level of development. The following section describes a few selected background characteristics.

Parental Characteristics

Marital Status A majority of the families had an adult male acting as the head of the household, Table 1. In 76 percent of the families the mother reported that she was married and living with her husband at the time of the interview. Of the remaining mothers, several said that a man friend was living with her or that the absent male was giving some financial aid to the family. Only four percent of the mothers were widowed. Negro mothers were more likely than whites to report that they had never been married. Twenty-seven percent of the Negro mothers were unmarried as compared with only seven percent of the whites.

Age Thirty-eight percent of the mothers were 20-29 years of age, and only 17 percent were 40-49 years. The average age of the mothers was 32 years. The average age of the male head of the household was 39 years of age. Nineteen percent of the men were under 29 and 11 percent were over 50 years of age. In quite a number of cases, especially in the Negro families, the man was considerably older than the wife.

Education Lack of education was a major handicap for most of the parents. Only 29 percent of the mothers had graduated from high school and thirty-four percent had completed less than nine grades of school. The educational level of the men was even lower than that

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF FAMILY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE COOSA - ELMORE COUNTY HEAD START PROGRAM

Characteristics	Sample families		
	Total	Negro	White
	---------Per cent----------		
Marital Status:			
Married	76	73	93
Never married	13	15	--
Divorced, separated or widowed	11	12	7
Mothers Age:			
20-29	38	33	57
30-39	44	48	29
40 and over	18	19	14
Males Age:			
20-29	19	14	36
30-39	37	37	36
40-49	33	35	28
50 and over	11	13	--
Education of Mother:			
Less than 8 years	17	21	--
8-9 years	32	31	36
10-11 years	26	26	29
12 and over	25	22	36
Education of Male:			
Less than 8 years	34	54	18
8-9 years	16	12	27
10-11 years	30	25	36
12 or over	18	9	18
Occupation of Mother:			
Unemployed	65	56	93
Unskilled and Domestic Work	28	35	--
Semi-skilled	5	5	7
Professional	3	3	--

Table 1--(Continued)

Characteristics	Sample families Total	Negro	White
Occupation of Male:			
Unemployed	6	4	7
Unskilled	23	27	14
Semi-skilled and service	38	41	36
Skilled	23	21	36
Farm	8	8	7
Professional	2	--	7
Incomes:			
0-$900	11	14	--
$1000-$1900	16	20	--
$2000-$2900	31	36	13
$3000-$3900	24	25	20
$4000 and above	17	5	67

of the women. Only thirteen percent of the men had graduated from high school and thirty-four percent had less than eight years of formal education. Only one woman stated that she could not read, and six reported their husbands could not read. After talking with these mothers, I had the feeling that several more would be classified as "functionally illiterate" if their reading skills were tested. *

Occupation About one-third (35 percent) of the mothers were gainfully employed outside the home, and only 15 percent had regular, full-time employment. Most were employed as domestic workers in private homes. Only seven percent of the white mothers worked as compared with 44 percent of the Negro mothers. However, most of the Negro mothers were employed as low-paid domestic workers, primarily maids in private households. In spite of the textile mills in the two-county areas, few of these mothers worked there, probably because of their educational handicap.

* Functionally illiterate--limited reading skills of less than fifth grade level.

Only six percent of the male heads of the households were unemployed. Almost all those employed were classified as blue collar workers with the largest proportion in semi-skilled and service jobs such as truck driving and janitorial work. In spite of the fact that the counties were largely rural in nature, less than 10 percent of the males reported farming as their occupation.

Income The poverty level is a variable determined according to the family income and the number of family members. If the income is less than $2000 for the first two family members and $500 for each additional member, the family is below the poverty line. For example, the income level for a family of four is $3,000; for a family of six--$4,000; and for one of seven members--$4,500.

The average annual income for these families from all sources was $2,700 per year. Eighty-two percent of the families had incomes below $5,000. Negroes had considerably lower incomes than whites. Thirty-four percent of the Negroes had incomes of less than $2,000 per year, and only five pervent had incomes of more than $4,000. Only one-third of the whites had incomes below $4,000, while 95 percent of the Negro families were in this category.

Living Conditions

Size household Half the families of Head Start children consisted of seven or more members and only 10 percent had four or less, Table 2. In many of the smaller families the six-year old child enrolled in Head Start was the oldest or next to the oldest child. With limited knowledge of family planning and birth control practices the younger mothers in these families can be expected to have more children in the future and to have large families which will overtax their already inadequate incomes. There is a need to disseminate information on family planning to mothers in the young adult age group at this stage in their family situation.

Comparisons of family size between Negro and white families showed that Negro families were usually larger than white families. Only seven percent of the white families had more than seven members, whereas 37 percent of the Negro families were this large.

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF HOUSEHOLD LIVING CONDITIONS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE COOSA-ELMORE COUNTY HEAD START PROGRAM

Characteristics	Sample Families Total	Negro	White
	---------Per cent----------		
Size Household:			
4 people or less	11	10	13
5-7 people	57	53	80
8 people or more	32	37	7
Size of House:			
4 rooms or less	51	52	47
5-6 rooms	38	36	46
7 rooms or more	11	12	7
Child Per Bed Ratio:			
Personal bed	12	8	27
2 Sharing bed	58	58	60
3 or more sharing bed			
Home Tenure:			
Owner	32	27	53
Non-owner	68	73	47
House Condition:			
Poor	37	36	38
Fair	20	22	16
Good	43	42	46

Size House Half the families occupied houses having four rooms or less while only 10 percent of the houses had seven rooms or more. Each mother was asked whether the house was large enough for her family. Exactly half the mothers answered yes to this question. However, if judged by middle class standards most of the houses would be considered too small.

Several respondents indicated their houses were sufficiently large while four or five people slept in one room, and three or four children slept in each bed. Very few families especially among the Negroes, had enough room for each child to have its own room or even for two children to share a room. In quite a few instances, every room was used as a bedroom and no one had a regular sleeping place as they slept in one bed one night and another the next.

Children Per Bed Only 12 percent of the mothers stated that each child had his own bed. In 30 percent of the families the children slept three or four to a bed. This condition was most pronounced among Negroes while only two white families reported it. Overcrowded sleeping conditions are directly related to a child's school performance. The lack of a good sound sleep lowers the child's learning efficiency.

Home Tenure Over half the families owned their homes or were in the process of paying off a mortgage. Many of the individually owned homes had been in the families for many years and had been occupied by several succeeding generations. Several of these houses were almost uninhabitable, but the families continued to live in them because they owned them.

House Condition While making the interview I observed the condition of the house and completed a short evaluation of its appearance. I did not use any rigorous, middle-class standards in making my evaluation but tried to emphasize liveability. About half the houses were rated in good living condition, but more than a third were dilapidated or badly in need of repair.

Level of Living

There are a wide range of material items in our society that are taken pretty much for granted by middle-class Americans. The possession of these items or the lack of them can be quite indicative of a child's home experiences and the family's value system relative to material goods. Quite a few of the families owned televisions but had no inside water, or they owned one or more cars but still cooked on a wood stove.

Communication Items Television was an item that most (87 percent) of the families owned. Almost three-fourths also owned a car or truck. Thirty-four percent received a weekly newspaper, but only 24 percent received a daily newspaper. Thirty-eight percent of the families owned

telephones. Most of those families who didn't have their own telephone said that there was one at a nearby relative or friend's home which they used.

Household Appliances The most frequently owned household appliance was the refrigerator. Only seven percent of the families did not own one. In two of the homes where there was no refrigerator, I saw a large block of ice wrapped in rags which was used for the refrigeration of goods.

Either a gas or electric stove was owned by almost three-fourths the families, but the remainder still cooked on a wood stove. As was expected, the vacuum cleaner ranked last on the list with only 13 percent owning one.

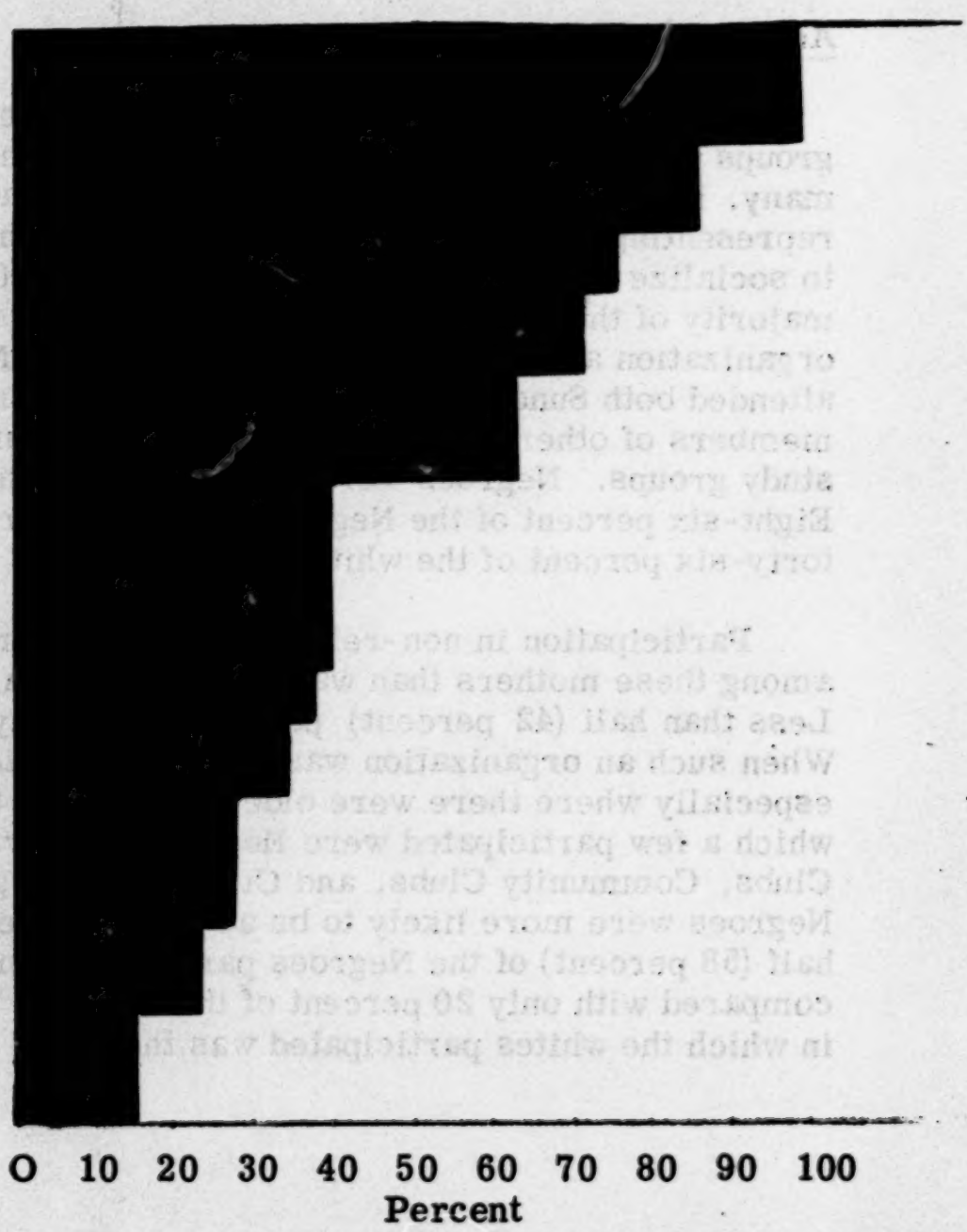

Fig. 1 Percent of Coosa-Elmore County Head Start households possessing selected level of living items.

Water Related Conveniences Less than half of the families had water piped inside the house. Most of those who didn't have inside water used a well, a hand pump, or a hydrant in the yard. Some families still carried water from a neighbor's house or from a nearby stream.

Quite a few of the people, who did not have inside water, did have washing machines. Some of them had water piped to the porch where the machine was, but did not have the water piped into the house. Others had to carry the water used in the machine. A few of those who did not own a machine, especially the whites, said they carried their clothes to a laundromat. However, the majority still used a wash pot in which they boiled their clothes. Inside baths or toilets were owned by only a fourth of the families.

Activities of Mother

Organizational Participation The church and its various related groups play an important role in the lives of most of these people. For many, it is the only involvement they have in a formal organization representing the community. Often the church offers their lone opportunity to socialize with people other than members of their own families. A majority of the mothers (82 percent) attended some type of religious organization at least once a month, Table 3. More than half (61 percent) attended both Sunday School and church and some (20 percent) were also members of other church groups such as missionary societies and Bible study groups. Negroes were more active in the church than were whites. Eight-six percent of the Negroes attended church regularly compared to forty-six percent of the whites.

Participation in non-religious organizations was much less frequent among these mothers than was participation in religious organizations. Less than half (42 percent) participated in any community organization. When such an organization was attended, it was most likely to be the PTA, especially where there were older children in the family. Other groups in which a few participated were Home Demonstration Clubs, Social Savings Clubs, Community Clubs, and Civil Rights Organization. Here again, Negroes were more likely to be active in these than were whites. More than half (58 percent) of the Negroes participated in some secular organization compared with only 20 percent of the whites. The only community organization in which the whites participated was the PTA.

TABLE 3

PARTICIPATION OF HEAD START MOTHERS IN RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Participation	Sample Families		
	Total	Negro	White
	----------	Per cent	----------
Church Involvement			
Non-member	8	3	27
Member, doesn't attend	11	10	13
Attended church only	19	22	7
Attended Sunday School & Church	42	41	47
Attended Sunday School & Church & other organizations	19	22	7
Community Organizations			
No participation	58	42	80
PTA	42	58	20
Home demonstration clubs	9	12	--
Social savings clubs	8	10	--
Community clubs	7	8	--
Civil rights organizations	1	2	--

Note: These percentages do not add to 100 percent because a person may have belonged to more than one organization or taken part in more than one religious organization.

Personal Interests When questioned about their personal interests many of the mothers said they had little or no time of their own after completing their regular household chores to spend on such things. In my opinion, the real reason for their not having more personal interests was really caused by a lack of motivation or desire to do these other things. Perhaps this resulted from lack of awareness and training, especially in the sense of having a skilled person available to teach them. Obviously, few of them had the knowledge or ability to do skilled tasks on their own without guidance.

In order to find out something about the recreational and leisure time activities of these mothers, each was asked about a long list of possible interests or hobbies. Although many said they did the various activities mentioned, I believe only a few were involved in them on a regular basis, Figure 2. For example, many of the respondents (85 percent) said they enjoyed reading, but in most cases, this consisted of reading an occasional story to the children or the comics. Sewing was also listed as a favorite hobby, but only a few owned sewing machines. The extent of most of their sewing appeared limited to mending. In very few, if any, cases were these mothers deeply involved in an activity to the extent that it could be called a hobby.

Interest Shared with Children Another aspect of this same consideration involved the types of activities these mothers participated in with their children. The most commonly mentioned activities were reading, playing ball, walking, and singing. It was not determined how regularly mothers took part in these activities with their children.

Desired Interest Development Many of the respondents indicated an interest in learning more about two of the activities mentioned in the interview. Sewing was mentioned by 77 percent of the mothers while 48 percent indicated an interest in learning more about cooking. Little interest was indicated in learning to read better. However, this could have been caused by the wording of the question or the overall context of leisure-time activities.

Activities

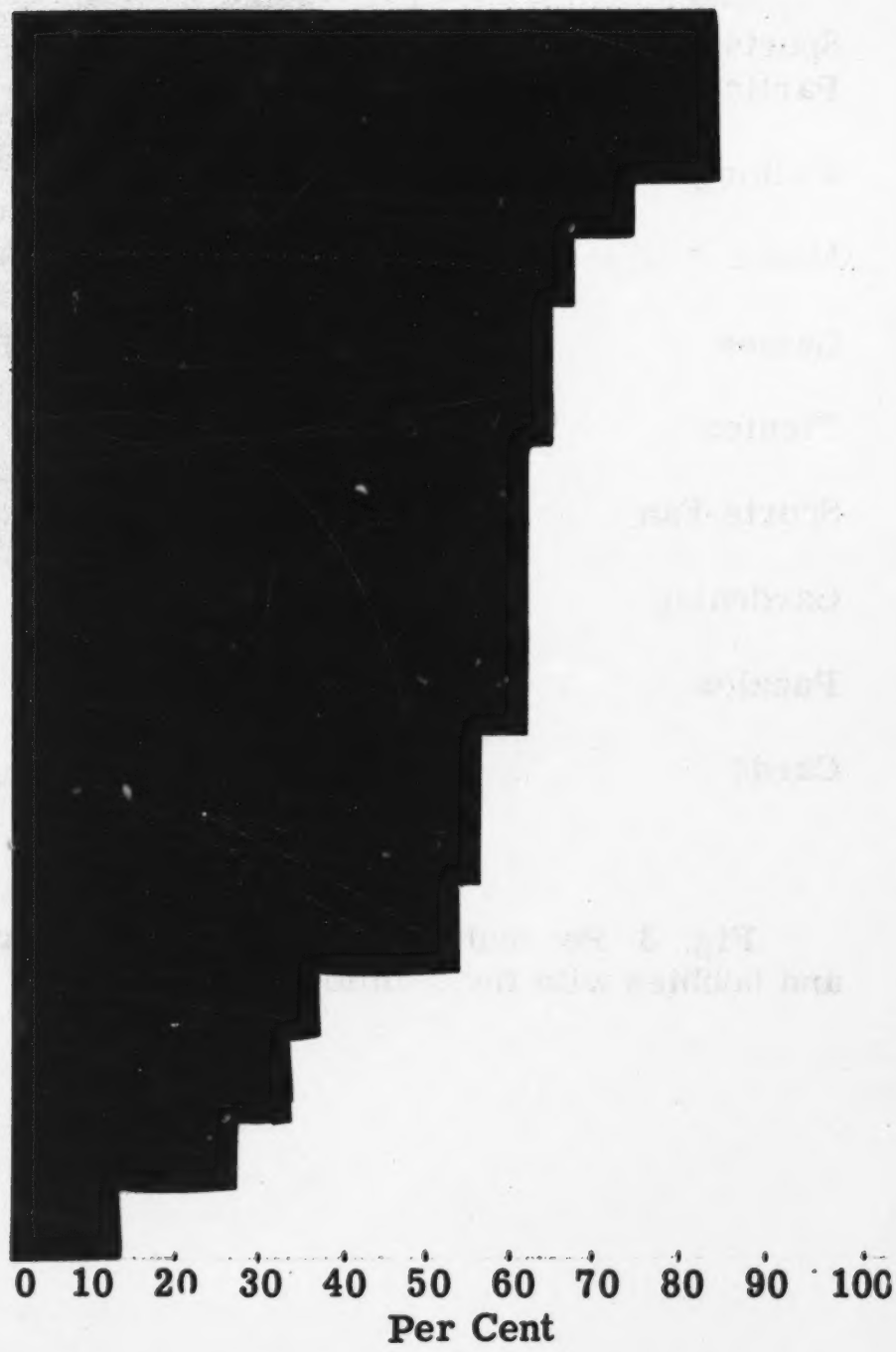

Fig. 2 Percent of mothers participating in selected interest activities and hobbies.

*Sports participant includes primarily family or neighborhood ballgames.

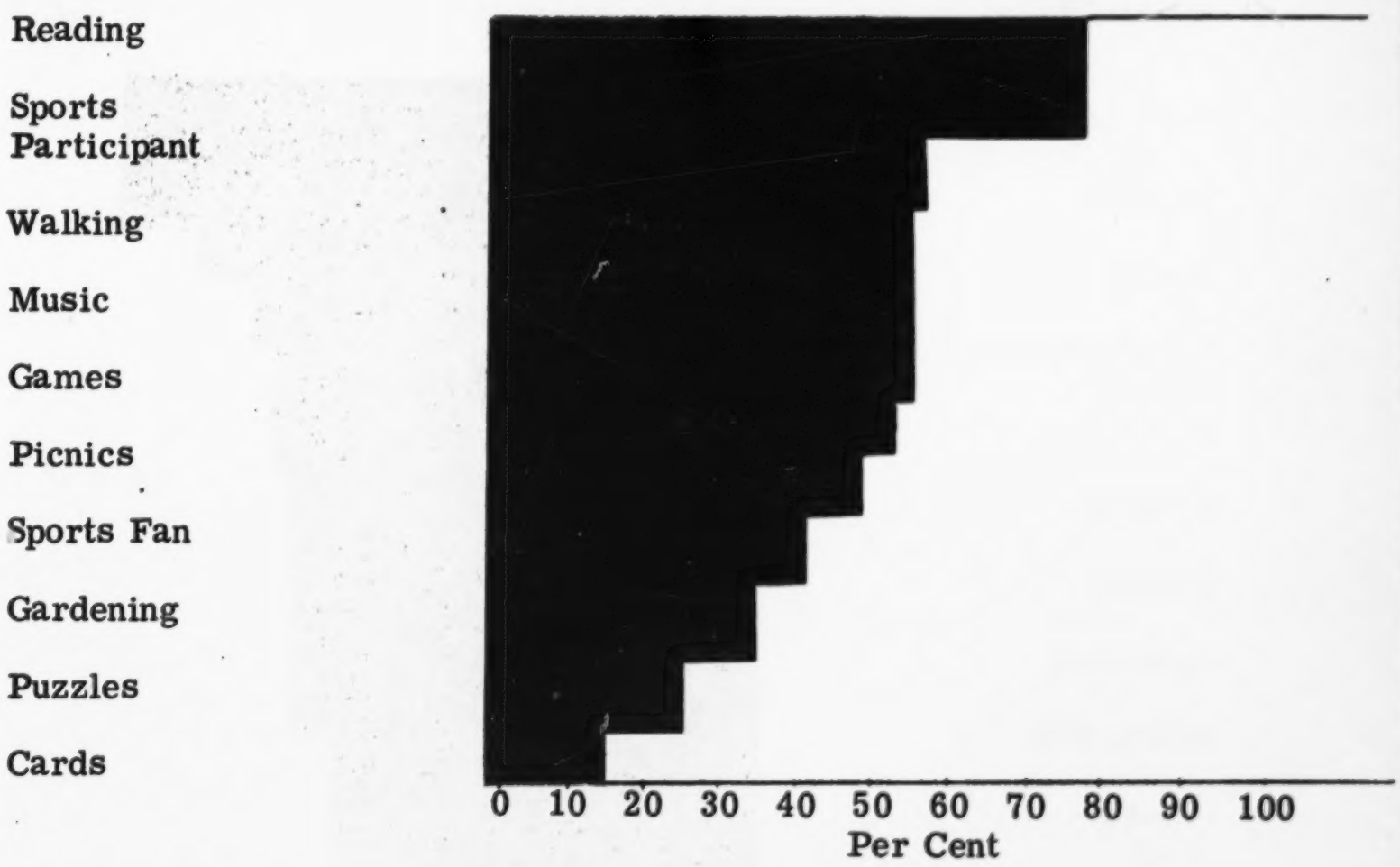

Fig. 3 Percent of mothers participating in selected interest activities and hobbies with their children.

Medical Services

Family Doctor Most mothers (95 percent) reported that their families had a family doctor to whom they went for medical care. However, few families made any extensive use of the doctor in an attempt to protect the health of their young children. Half the children attending Head Start had not been to a doctor in the past year and only 18 percent had been there more than twice. Quite a few mothers said they had never carried their child to the doctor since it was an infant.

Mid-wife One medical practice still widely followed among these families is the use of mid-wives in child birth. Almost half the Head Start participants had been born at home with a mid-wife attending. This was common only among the Negroes, however, as all of the whites reported using the hospital.

Health Department Services offered by the County Health Department seemed to be known to most mothers. Three-fourths of them reported they had made use of this service during the past year. Seventy percent of the children had received the shots required for school admission from this source. Only one child had received his shots from the family doctor. Not all the children had as yet received their shots at the time this survey was conducted. More Negroes (34 percent) were in this category than white (13 percent). It is reasonable to expect that most of these families will use the health department for obtaining this service.

Dentist One of the health needs most often neglected by these families was the care of their teeth. Only 11 percent of the children had ever been to the dentist. One-third the whites had had a dental check-up but only five percent of the Negro children.

Food Consumption

Expenditures for food were extremely low in almost all these Head Start families with 60 percent spending less than four dollars a week per person for food. There was considerable similarity in the kinds of foods eaten by most of these families. The main breakfast foods were grits, biscuits, and syrup. Lunch usually consisted of a snack including peanut butter sandwiches or crackers, or left-over biscuits with syrup. Cool-aid was by far the favorite beverage.

The evening meal usually consisted of vegetables, cornbread, and some type of meat. Cornbread and collard greens were served almost every night, and they usually had one other vegetable such as peas or beans. Often the vegetables were supplied from their own garden. Almost three-fourths the families had some type of meat for dinner. The meats most often mentioned were fat back, pig's ears and feet, fish, and chicken.

Most of the children (95 percent) drank soft drinks on a regular basis, but only 11 percent usually had more than one per day. On the other hand, very few of the children drank milk regularly. Most of the mothers seemed aware that the children needed milk but contended they could not afford it on a regular basis. Many of them said the children drank milk occasionally.

PREPARATION AND PROGRESS OF CHILD

The type and nature of the pre-school learning experiences of children from poverty and low-income families in Coosa and Elmore Counties was one of my major concerns in making this study. Of special interest was the evaluation given by the mother concerning her child's experiences and level of development before and after participation in the Head Start Program. Information on this question was obtained during my second interview with 36 or half of the original sample of 74 mothers.

I found a great deal of difference among the children with regard to their early experiences. Some children had almost none of the skills or social experiences commonly possessed by the middle-class child at this age. A few children were fortunate enough to have had a fairly wide range of experiences. My purpose in the following section is to report on the level and type of early experiences that existed among these children according to their mothers and to indicate the mothers' evaluation of progress achieved by the children during the eight-week Head Start session.

Personal Skills

Only two mothers reported their children did not know their first and last names prior to entering the summer program, Table 4. More importantly, however, only one-third could write or print his or her first name. By the end of the summer half the children were able to print their names and most of the others could at least recognize their names when they saw it.

About half the children could not recognize and name the different colors at the start of the program but 80 percent knew them at the end of the eight weeks. In addition, even the children who already had some skill in this area had improved and expanded their ability.

According to reports by the mothers, none of the children could count above 50 at the beginning of the summer and over half (54 percent) could count no higher than 10. Only half of the children could tie their shoes. Three-fourths knew how to dress themselves with little or no help. Over half also knew how to answer the telephone, but only 10 percent could make a telephone call without assistance.

School Materials Almost all of the children had used paper, pencil, crayons, and scissors prior to their summer training. About half had also worked with clay, paste, and paints. Since the extent to which these materials had been experimented with is not known, it is hard to measure their progress. It is doubtful that contact with these materials prior to the Head Start experience was very extensive and the skill levels were probably very limited.

Household Materials Most of the boys had "worked" around the house with a hammer, screw driver, and rake; and almost half had used a paint brush. Most of the girls had tried to use a broom, dust rag, and cooking utensils. Only a few girls had been allowed to use an iron.

Cleanliness Habits All the children had a toothbrush which had been given to them at Head Start, and the mothers (3/4) said their children brushed their teeth at least once a day. The children's habits prior to the Head Start were not determined, however; I feel that the percentage would have been considerably less if the facts were known. Eight-four percent of the mothers reported their children washed their hands before eating, but most mothers agreed that Head Start had helped their children become more aware of this practice.

Personal Experience

Three-fourths the mothers stated that they read to their children at least once a week; and half said they read to them almost daily. Also, two-thirds the mothers indicated they played games with the children at least once a week. Games mentioned most frequently were different kinds of ball games in which several members of the family participated.

Watching television was one of the favorite pastimes of almost all the children. Practically all the children (81 percent) watched television more than an hour a day. Even children in homes that lacked televisions had access to a set owned by a nearby relative or neighbor which they watched. Half the children had attended movies but only 12 percent attended as often as once a month.

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF CHILDREN'S SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO THE HEAD START PROGRAM

Experiences	Total	Sample Families: Negro	White	Aide	Non-Aide
	----------	Per Cent	----------		
Skills Possessed:					
Knew his first & last names	94	92	100	87	96
Could write his name	32	28	50	25	35
Knew the names of colors	55	60	33	50	57
Could not count above ten	54	56	50	50	56
Knew how to answer telephone	55	52	67	50	57
Could make a phone call	10	4	33	--	13
Could dress himself	77	76	83	63	83
Could tie his shoes	48	52	33	37	52
Had Used the Following Items:					
Pencil	94	92	100	100	92
Crayons	97	96	100	88	100
Paste	52	48	67	63	48
Scissors	90	88	100	88	92
Clay	55	52	67	63	52
Paints	32	28	50	37	30
Boys Who Had Used:					
Hammer	92	90	100	100	90
Screw driver	77	70	100	100	70
Rake	92	90	100	100	90
Paint brush	46	40	67	67	40
Girls Who Had Used:					
Broom	100	100	100	100	100
Cooking utensils	83	80	100	80	85
Dust rags	100	100	100	100	100
Iron	22	20	33	--	31

Table 4. --(Continued)

Experiences	Sample Families Total	Negro	White	Aide	Non-Aide
	----------Per Cent----------				
In Home					
Mother Reads to Child:					
Never	10	12	--	12	8
1-2 a month or less	16	16	17	12	16
Several times a week	75	72	83	76	74
Mother Plays with Child:					
Never	13	12	17	--	17
Once a month or less	19	16	34	--	25
Almost daily	68	72	50	100	56
Hours Child Watches T. V, Daily:					
No T. V.	13	16	--	38	4
1-2 hrs.	52	52	50	38	55
More than 2 hrs.	35	32	50	25	39
In Society:					
Been to zoo, circus or fair	43	44	50	12	55
Been to a large city	45	36	83	37	48
Attended movie	52	44	83	50	52
Traveled by bus	38	44	17	37	39
Been to a large department store	64	68	50	88	56

For many of these children, their world consisted of their own immediate community. Half of them had never been to a city as large as Montgomery or Birmingham or to a zoo, circus or fair. Other common experiences such as shopping in a large department store or riding on a train or bus were not a part of the experiences of many of these children.

Aide - Non-Aide Comparison

There were few differences in pre-school experiences observed between children whose mothers served as aides and those whose mothers had no contact with the program. The aides played with their children at least once a week whereas only half the non-aides played with their children that frequently. Fewer of the children (12 percent) whose mothers served as aides had visited a zoo or attended a circus as compared to more than half the other children. Another significant difference was that 44 percent of the children of non-aides had never been to a department store as compared with 12 percent of the aides' children. One may conclude from this that aides were selected from the poorest families and these mothers were most in need of assistance and the experience received at the center.

Negro-White Comparison

No distinctive pattern existed which suggested special consideration were needed for either white or Negro children. The fact of poverty and low-income seemed to have a rather universal effect on the children's early experiences. Those differences which were observed involved such things as the greater likelihood that white children had been to a city, but, on the other hand, Negro children were more likely to have been to a large department store. In most cases, there was little difference in the proportion of Negro and white children having these rather general kinds of social experiences.

EVALUATION OF CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

Half the 74 mothers comprising the original sample were selected for inclusion in the follow-up phase aimed at obtaining information on the program from the perspective of the mother's evaluation of her child's experience. All mothers contacted in the follow-up indicated that the Head Start Program had provided a worthwhile experience for their children. When asked to estimate the extent to which they thought the program had helped their child, 81 percent of the mothers rated the experiences as "very helpful."

Child's Reaction

One of my concerns was to determine the extent to which mother and child in poorer families communicate with each other. In this case this meant the extent to which the mother inquired about the child's experiences or simply observed the child's reactions.

All the mothers interviewed except one indicated a curiosity about what their children were doing at school. They all said they questioned their children almost every day about his or her activities. Most of the children (88 percent) came home from school eager to talk about their school experiences. Usually the children brought things home to show their mothers. Several mothers had pictures hanging on the walls made by the children and seemed proud of being able to show examples of their child's accomplishments. I inquired further concerning how the mother reacted toward the child when he or she brought home school work. It is important to children's educational development that they be encouraged to do well by the parents. In this case, all the mothers stated they made "a fuss" over their child's work and bragged on it.

The school activities the mothers said the children seemed to like best were playing games, painting, playing with toys, singing and coloring. Over half the mothers reported their children frequently sang school songs at home and talked about the toys they had played with at school. About one-third frequently played new games learned at school. Only ten percent of the mothers indicated their children rarely talked about their school activities.

Benefits of Program

In general, mothers reported their children were eager to go to school each day and seemed to enjoy the experience. The provision of an interesting and enjoyable early experience for the new school-age child is one of the major goals of the program. It would appear from this very favorable evaluation that some degree of success had been attained in this regard.

An attempt was made to further analyze this evaluation in terms of some of the more important purposes underlying the program. Seven generally accepted Head Start objectives were included in the questionnaire and each mother was asked to indicate how helpful the experience had been to her child in each respect, Table 5. "Learning to get along with other children" was the experience most often considered very helpful by the mothers. A similar high evaluation was placed on "learning how to act in school". Evaluations related to experiences received which will aid the child in adjusting to the demands of the school situation and to interpersonal relationships with other people were rated "very helpful" by more than half the mothers. Fewer mothers felt that training related to personal hygiene and table manners had been "very helpful." Only a few mothers indicated the program had been of no help to their children in these latter two areas. One explanation for this may be the fact that some of the mothers felt their children had already been taught these things at home.

General Evaluation

Most of these mothers seemed quite favorable toward the Head Start Program. Especially mentioned by the mothers was the good relationship between children and teachers, the wide variety of activities, the group participation, and the good food. However, there was a wide disparity in the knowledge possessed concerning the purpose and activities of the Head Start Program. About one-fourth the mothers seemed to know very little about what their children were doing, while at the other extreme, about one-third could be termed "well informed" about the program.

TABLE 5

MOTHER'S EVALUATION OF HOW HEAD START HELPED THEIR CHILDREN

Benefits	Percent who said program was very helpful		
	Total	Aide	Non-Aide
Learning to get along with other children	81	88	78
Teaching them how to act in school	77	88	74
Teaching them to get along with teachers	64	75	61
Helping them get used to being away from home	62	75	57
Teaching them new skills	55	88	43
Teaching them new cleanliness habits	38	25	43
Teaching them to eat with a knife and fork	36	25	39

An opportunity was given to most but not all the mothers to attend special meetings where the program was outlined and the children's progress discussed. Twenty percent of the mothers lived in areas in which mother's meetings had not been held. In other areas where meetings were held, approximately 80 percent of the mothers reported they had attended. All mothers who attended these meetings agreed that they were both interesting and helpful.

Aide and Non-Aide Comparison

Aides were much more familiar with the Head Start Program than were the non-aides because of their first hand contact with the actual school routine. Of those mothers who had not served as aides one-third had never visited the center where the school was held and only half the mothers had visited more than two times during the eight weeks.

Mothers who had served as aides for one of the two four-week periods all displayed a greater awareness of the limited scope of the program than did the non-aides. A split session was used with two sets of aides in order to involve more mothers with the program. Aides were generally aware that the program was not trying to teach the children to read and write but was attempting to acquaint them with social and personal skills essential to good school adjustment. Some of the non-aides appeared quite confused about what their children were supposed to be learning.

All the aides and three-fourths the non-aides felt that Head Start had been either "very helpful" to their children with the rest feeling it had been at least "some help" to them. I believe the aides knew better than the non-aides what type of progress to look for in their children and were more aware of how much the program had helped them.

Negro-White Comparison

Both Negro and white mothers seemed to be well satisfied with the Head Start Program overall. Race made no significant difference in the mothers' familiarity with the program on their evaluation of it.

CONCLUSIONS

I have come to the conclusion that one of the main problems confronting the mothers whom I interviewed was the fact that they were not able to give their children individualized attention because of the number of children and because of the limited knowledge they had of good child rearing practices. The early age at which these mothers began bearing children did not give them adequate time to mature, and many are now torn between the demands and needs of their children and their own needs.

Because of the limited time the mother has to devote to each child in addition to her lack of education and knowledge of the needs of children, I feel Head Start has been of inestimable value to these children. The children have had many new experiences this summer, such as participating in organized group play and learning new habits of cleanliness. In addition they have had physical and dental check-ups which for many were also new experiences. Just riding a bus and getting away from the limitations of their own family groups was a big step and a much needed experience for many of the children.

Without the experiences gained at Head Start, many of these children would have begun their school life far behind the average child, and because of the additional drag of their home experiences they would have fallen farther behind each year.

Social values among these representatives of the poor are well shown in the way they handle their money. Many of the adults in these families are not able to distinguish between luxuries and necessities and stress immediate gratification of their desires rather than postponing them until a more suitable time arises. These adults do not seem to realize the importance of such things as a well-balanced diet and formal education for their children.

Furthermore, the absence of home conveniences accounts for much of the lack of cleanliness and good grooming found among the poor. It is certainly easier to go to bed without a bath than to haul water from an outdoor hydrant or well, heat it on a wood stove, pour it in a tub which is used for washing clothes, and to take a public bath in an overcrowded house. Most of the mothers know little or nothing about the importance of personal health habits. This fact coupled with the fact that they see a doctor or dentist only when they have a very serious or extremely painful illness

probably accounts for the lower-than-average health of many of the parents and children.

In my opinion, the problems in these families are not generally the result of a lack of concern and love on the part of the mothers for their children. I found that most of the mothers sincerely wanted what was best for their children. Most of them wanted very much to improve their existing living conditions, and to be able to better provide for their children's needs. Unfortunately, however, neither through their education nor personal experience, have they learned a method of living commensurate with their proclivity for reproducing.

Statistics show that illigitimacy has doubled in the last few years and that one out of four Negro children are born out of wedlock. Added to this is the high rate of desertion by the father among the poor. One can review these facts and conclude, as I have, that the breakdown of family life and the inability to form a stable family unit are the major problems of today. Households managed by females without the support, authority, and example of a male father image is causing inumerable youths--male and female--to suffer from acute social and intellectual poverty. This is clearly shown in school attendance, school drop-outs, the rise in juvenile delinquency, the lack of respect for authority, and the upward trend in unemployment among adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In my opinion, the first summer Head Start program in Coosa and Elmore Counties was very successful. Results of my study indicated that many children from poor families were reached by the program and that benefits were not limited only to the children, but extended to the mothers, as well. In light of this I have only a few recommendations to make. The suggestions I have for the future operation of the Head Start Program lie primarily in the area of greater efficiency in reaching the underprivileged youth of the area.

(1) My first recommendation is that Head Start be made a 12-month program carried on throughout the year rather than for just two months during the summer. Although much progress could be seen in the children who attended the program this summer, two months is too short a period to overcome in any significant way the meager home experiences of most of these children. Since many of the home conditions were inadequate for providing worthwhile pre-school experiences, these children need to be exposed to meaningful experiences, such as those provided by Head Start, at least a year before they enter school. This would give them adequate time to become adjusted to the routines they will confront in school.

(2) My second recommendation is that before Head Start begins next summer, an extensive survey be made of Elmore and Coosa counties in an effort to reach all of the children in the low social and economic level. It is self-evident that the Head Start Program cannot adequately fulfill its purpose if it does not reach all or most of these children.

(3) My final recommendation is that there be more parents' meetings and more parent involvement in future Head Start programs. Most of the mothers I talked with felt that the parents meetings had been very worthwhile, and they seemed pleased with what they had learned at the meetings. If the programs continue to be interesting and on a level that these people can understand I believe the parents will continue to attend. As for actual involvement in the programs as aides, the information obtained in this study suggests that beneficial results accrued to the mothers who had an opportunity to participate.

In addition to the recommendations I have made concerning the Head Start Program, I would like to make the following general suggestions to the Community Action Committee for additional programs they might consider in the future.

(1) Judging from the families I have visited this summer, I think one of the biggest needs in our area is for community centers where adult education in nutrition and homemaking, financial values and management, child care and guidance, family planning, and counseling can be obtained. These centers might act as a referral center from which clients can be sent to other agencies.

(2) Another much needed service is for day-care centers to provide inexpensive nursery facilities for the young children of employed and over-worked mothers.

(3) I also recommend that the Community Action Agency work as closely as possible with all of the existing community facilities such as the schools and churches to strengthen family life and to teach personal responsibility.